

been conducted in an air-conditioned dark room. Kilner claimed that the "depth" of his aura was influenced by a magnet and that it was sensitive to electric currents, even apparently vanishing under a negative charge from a Wilmhurst machine and increasing by about 50 per cent after dissipation of the effect. As for Krippner's "PK effect", what we study in the experimental set-up may be only a secondary psi effect, psi as modifying the ordinary biological informational systems. The refinements of ordinary signal-detection theory, with some important modifications, will hold. It is much too early, in my opinion, to talk of new "energy fields," around living organisms which are influenced by the output of the "higher brain centres" in human subjects.

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Madam,

"Contemporary reports of D.D. Home's phenomena", George Zorab asserts in your June 1976 issue, "are comparatively rare". As I have had reason recently to discover, they are on the contrary astonishingly abundant and varied, coming from scientists, scholars and socialites (they are also, incidentally surprisingly convincing: I suspect it is largely owing to Podmore's systematic denigration that this has not been more fully appreciated, Podmore having been an adept, like some of his successors, in selecting the evidence which fitted his case, and ignoring or twisting the evidence against it).

As for G.W. Lambert's hoary old soil-erosion hypothesis, it really will not do. What was remarkable about Home was precisely that he did *not* give his seances in a few select places; situated, conveniently for the hypothesis, above underground rivers or railways. As even his detractors had to concede, he could produce phenomena in town houses, country houses, or in the open: often he performed in palaces; at least once in a police station. The vast majority of seances appear to have been given in establishments where there had been no reported phenomena before (or the accounts would presumably have mentioned them). In any case, most of the phenomena bore no resemblance to the kind of effects which soil erosion or any other such explanation could account for.

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Madam,

Mr. Lambert allows himself some basically incorrect statements in attempting to explain the D.D. Home phenomena in terms of underground water.

(1) He writes: "Curiously enough, the fact that in *many cases*" the great power manifested itself before DDH appeared on the scene and continued to do so after he had left, does not seem to have alerted sitters to the possibility that perhaps DDH had nothing to do with the manifestations at all."

This *may* occasionally have happened in the course of the 3500 sittings of D.D. Home's mediumistic career but I cannot off hand recall even one instance. Such occurrences were never recorded in the States, in Cox's hotel, in Mr. Rymer's house, at the Trollopes' residence at Florence, at the Tuilleries palace in Paris, or during the numerous sittings conducted in Russia, Holland, France, Italy, Geneva, etc.

(2) He further states: "There are reliable records of the operation of the great power in many places other than London, and in countries other than England. It was *usually* \* disturbances caused by the great power which led to DDH being invited to the house affected so that he could parley with 'the spirits' and discourage further interference. In his day there was evidence of it in France, Germany, Holland, Italy and the U.S.A. all of which countries DDH held sittings, *sometimes with astonishing success*, in the sense that the disturbances occurred in his presence. . . ."

I have read through hundreds of DDH sittings without coming across one word mentioning that DDH had been invited to the house to give a sitting in order to lay the ghost that with its "disturbances" was getting on the inmates' nerves. The term *usually* gives a completely wrong representation of DDH's activities when invited by various people to conduct a seance. The words "sometimes with astonishing success" also distort facts. It is certain that 90% of DDH's sittings were an "astonishing" success; and also that DDH often conducted sittings practically every day over long periods.

To support his hypothesis Mr. L. suggests that the so-called earth-quake-effect phenomenon (vibrations and oscillations throughout the seance-room) observed in an Amsterdam hotel where DDH conducted a sitting, was caused, not by DDH's paranormal powers, but by the "disturbances" to which he believes the hotel was prone. But he is wrong. No "disturbances" had previously occurred.

I cite a series of phenomena witnessed during a sitting with DDH as the medium in the residence of Major Gregorie at Florence in February 1856 and reported by Lord Lindsay who, according to Dr.

\* my italics

Dingwall was an acute and trustworthy observer. I quote from Dr. Dingwall's article describing the case.

"At the third sitting, at which the writer himself was present, he declined to sit with the circle at the table as he thought that if he were outside he might not be influenced by any suggestions, since he says he was aware of the explanation which maintained that the phenomena were subjective.

"After the rest of the circle had taken their places, the usual manifestations occurred. Taps began almost at once on the underside of the table, and then 'the table began to vibrate, and then the chairs; and then the floor and then the whole room trembled and shook, while the china rattled on the table at the further end of the room.'

"On looking under the table Lord Lindsay saw nothing except the feet of the persons present. But immediately afterwards the table 'rose suddenly straight up to the height of four feet—remained suspended in the air about half a minute, swaying about in different directions—I again looked under the table, while it was moving about, but there was nothing visible—and then it came down again gently'. . . . ." (E.J. Dingwall, pp. 63-64)

The underground water hypothesis does not account for the facts that the phenomena were selective. If underground water pressure had been at work, it would have been a wholesale affair, and could not have distributed its vibrations to affect first the table, then the chairs, etc. Moreover, directly afterwards we have the table levitating, swaying to and fro in the air, descending gently to the floor, etc.; phenomena to which Mr. Lambert's theory is completely irrelevant. The occurrences witnessed by Lord Lindsay were the rule rather than the exception in DDH's mediumship.

Finally, I was much surprised by the suggestion that in the Ashley House case DDH cheated his friends by pretending he had floated from one window to another, whereas he had in fact swung over by means of ropes. Mr. Lambert has continually stressed his theory that DDH won his reputation as a great medium by carefully waiting for the "disturbances" in the seance-room to be caused by underground water.

At this point, however, he assumes that DDH was such an outstanding fool as to risk his great reputation in an attempt to convince his friends that he was able to float from one window to another 60 feet above the pavement. DDH was no fool, and was never exposed as a fraudulent medium so that Mr. L.'s rope-swinging hypothesis, seems very unreasonable. Why *should* a man who had built himself a world-reputation as a worker of miracles suddenly use a trick to convince those who no longer needed to be convinced?

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**G. Zorab**

## References

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Madam,

I have no way of knowing whether the phenomena attributed to D.D. Home are genuine or not; and if they be genuine, what their explanation may be. However, I am sure that the explanations proffered by G.W. Lambert in the June 1976 *Journal*, pp. 298-313, are incorrect on purely mechanical grounds.

Lambert attributes the phenomena, such as the lifting of a table from the floor, to movement of the building as a whole brought about by one or more of four causes:

- (a) Collapse through settlement or soil erosion.
- (b) Leverage from a tree moving in the wind.
- (c) Vibrations from engineering operations.
- (d) Shock waves from movement of underground water.

I will deal briefly with each of these in turn.

(a) Collapse of buildings through soil erosion and underground workings leaves behind permanent and clear evidence of collapse, namely cracked walls, faults in the courses of brickwork, deviations from the vertical and settlements that can be interpreted even by the layman. It is not on record that the several houses in which the phenomena occurred showed such signs of collapse; and in the absence of such evidence it is inadmissible to assume that collapse occurred.

(b) Movement of tree roots could lift bodily a garden shed or wooden shack, but not a substantial brick or stone building of several stories. The houses along the tree-lined canals in the older part of Amsterdam are all of a type. They are terraced. They are solidly built of brick or masonry. They are three or four stories high, and are built on piles extending downwards to a depth of ten metres or more through the shifting sand to points where they are anchored to the firmer strata below. Many of them have stood for two centuries and more and show no serious signs of movement or collapse. Tree roots certainly do damage, but the damage is slow and starts with cracked walls and foundations in the neighbourhood of the roots. If I have to believe that a tree, acting as a lever, can lift and drop the mass of masonry in these terraced blocks with accelerations in excess of the gravitational acceleration, I will give up physics. Virtually the whole of Amsterdam is built on underground water, and there are still plenty of hotels there that are "dingy and unattractive", but this does not

necessarily mean that they are liable to disturbances—at any rate, disturbances of the type studied by the S.P.R.

(c) Vibrations produced by engineering machinery can be propagated through the earth for considerable distances. In my last house, I was troubled with vibrations from a factory compressor located at a distance of more than a quarter-mile away. However, the amplitude, and hence the energy, of such vibrations falls off rapidly with distance and becomes small at more than a few feet from the centre of the disturbance. Such vibrations are almost inappreciable unless the natural frequency of vibrations of some small object is nearly the same as the frequency of the disturbance or one of its harmonics. Resonance then occurs and the object may chatter or buzz. In some cases the vibration may cause it to "walk" off the edge of a shelf which is not quite level, and fall to the ground. In extreme cases, glass or china may crack as a result of the vibration. In no case, however, is the energy sufficient to project the object horizontally for a distance of several feet or to raise it vertically from its support. Furthermore, these periodic disturbances and the effects arising from them are easily recognized for what they are.

(d) The energy carried by a suddenly released flood of water is propagated mainly in the direction of flow. However, we may assume for the sake of argument that for some reason substantial energy is propagated in the form of a shock wave normal to the walls of the sluice. We make the further unlikely assumption that the walls of the sluice are not damaged thereby. The wave will be transmitted through the ground, through the foundations and fabric of the building to the floors and objects resting thereon. For an object to leave the floor, the accelerations developed during the passage of the wave must exceed the gravitational acceleration, and this places the shock wave at once in the category of major earthquakes, such as the one that has just devastated a large area in China. Such extreme shocks act indiscriminately and will not only cause the table to leave the floor, but will also cause tiles to leave the roof, chimneys to collapse, windows to break, ceilings to fall in and walls to crack or fall away. One would also expect to find extensive damage to surrounding pavements, and the effects of a shock of such magnitude should be traceable all along the length of the sluice. The contractors would be faced with a heavy bill for damage to property. It is not on record that this happened.

If indeed a heavy table "rose and descended to the floor smoothly, without any abrupt movement" and if the levitation was confined to the table and if no permanent and clear signs of damage to the house were evident afterwards, then the movement of the table, whatever its cause, could not have been due to the movement of the building as a

whole for any of the reasons cited above. I am all in favour of providing normal explanations of phenomena where possible, but I cannot accept "explanations" that violate the known laws of mechanics.

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### MR LAMBERT & MR HOME

Madam,

All your readers would probably welcome 'natural' explanations—or indeed *any* explanations—of the phenomena associated with D.D. Home. But I doubt if many of us will find Mr Lambert's suggestions, convincing.

He asks us to believe, first, that a number of householders in Victorian London, plagued by recurrences of loud noises and violent vibrations, lacked the common sense to link them either with the construction of railways (which they can hardly not have known to be proceeding beneath their foundations) or with drains, storm water or other material causes. Instead, they concluded that the phenomena were caused by spirits, and invited DDH, rather than the plumber or the Borough Engineer, to deal with the situation.

Second, it is suggested that DDH was so adept at hypnotizing his clients that, even though he could neither cause, control nor curtail these phenomena, he was able to build up a unique reputation for his psychic powers, and that he did so in the face of sceptical and often hostile critics.

If the phenomena were indeed independent of DDH, we should expect to hear that they occurred even when he was absent. He could hardly arrange for every manifestation to coincide with one of his sittings. So when Crookes refers to "chairs knocked about . . . the table floated about six inches from the ground . . . loud and unpleasant noises bawling in our ears", we would expect to hear that such things had happened both before and after DDH appeared on the scene. A scientist like Crookes, however credulous he may have been in some respects, could hardly have failed to observe a total lack of correlation between medium and phenomena.

Again, since it is unlikely that *every* householder plagued by such phenomena called in DDH, we must suppose that comparable phenomena were happening elsewhere. Yet what other reports mention them except at other spiritualist sittings? Moreover, since

according to Mr Lambert's hypothesis the phenomena arose from geographically locatable causes, Home's clients' next-door neighbours must often have been similarly plagued: did they never compare notes over the garden wall?

But such circumstantial considerations are only secondary. What is of ultimate importance is whether the physical causes proposed by Mr Lambert adequately explain the phenomena reported. It would be easy to find, from accounts of DDH's performances, phenomena infinitely more difficult to explain than those he cites. Yet even if we confine ourselves to these, it is not easy to see his hypothesis as adequate. Crookes believed that a table was floating—not briefly rising, but *floating*—some six inches above the floor. Now, it may well have been a trick: but whatever it was, it was surely something more than the effect of vibrations caused by stormwater or subterranean engineering. How much more would this be true of some of DDH's more dramatic performances, conducted in less familiar surroundings, and under more rigorous conditions!

Even if we accept that subterranean disturbances, coupled with DDH's powers of suggestion, could induce such illusions in Crookes and other investigators, other aspects of Mr Lambert's hypothesis still remain unconvincing. Thus for instance he suggests that DDH and other mediums favoured the Marble Arch area because "the going was good" for demonstrations of "the great power". I offer the simpler suggestion that, in the prevailing socio-economic circumstances of London, this particular area offered a favourable combination of central location, smartish address and moderate rents, well suited to people in Guppy/Herne/Home circumstances. Why did they congregate there? Why not as the natural consequence of simple recommendation between acquaintances or associates—"I know of a house in the next street which would suit you".

I am not claiming that DDH's manifestations were genuine. But we need to find something a good deal more convincing than Mr Lambert's hypothesis to account for them. Whatever powers DDH employed to achieve his ends—even if, as he himself claimed, he was merely their instrument—they were more intimately linked to himself than to the rise and fall of subterranean stormwater, or the engineering operations of the London Underground Railway.

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Madam,

Mr. Lambert seeks to explain table movements by disturbance from

December 1976]

*Correspondence*

underground rivers. But I have seen, in good light, a heavy table rise right off the ground and remain apparently floating in the air. It is hard to see how underground waters could cause this, especially as only the table moved, while other small objects in the room remained undisturbed.

**Henry Meulen**

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Madam,

A recurrent problem in investigating telepathy or precognition is to find a subject who can perform "on demand" under laboratory conditions. Most cases are spontaneous, and, while they may leave a lasting impression of certainty in the subject's mind, the actual psychic event is usually so brief that he is seldom able to give any description of what happened.

It struck me that if we could somehow observe such a psychic incident in "slow motion" we might gain valuable information. I have been wondering if it would be possible, using hypnosis, to regress a subject to such a psychic intuition and hold him in it long enough (1) to record his physiological state (with EEG, blood pressure readings, etc.), and (2) to get a subjective and detailed report from the subject as to exactly what he is feeling.

If this were successful one might, using bio-feedback techniques, be able to induce such a receptive state at will.

I would be grateful if any of your readers, particularly those with experience in hypnosis, who have any ideas on the subject would communicate with me. And of course I would also like to know if this method has been tried before, and with what success.

I should tell you that I am sending a similar letter to the *ASPR* and to *New Horizons* (Canada), in the hope of hearing from people who may not see the *SPR Journal*.

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